

The Sunday School

LESSON FOR OCTOBER 8

BY THE EDITOR

Haman's Plot Against the Jews.—Esther 3:1-11

Home Readings

Esther made queen, Esther 2:15-23.
Haman's Plot against the Jews, Esth. 3:1-11.
The decree of death, Esth. 3:12 to 4:3.
Sorrow in the palace, Esth. 4:4-17.
Pride discomfited, Esth. 6:1-11.
The enemy punished, Esth. 7.
Danger of pride, Prov. 16:5-19.

The Text Explained

Verse 1. After the events recorded in the previous chapter. It was the twelfth year of the reign of Ahasuerus, but five years after chapter 2:16. The king raised Haman to the prime confidential minister, an office of pre-eminence. There was nothing in his character that merited such promotion.

V. 2. Mordecai was a Jew and full cousin of Esther. He had adopted her as his daughter after the death of her parents. Esther 2:7, 15. He refused to bow because in doing so he would have been untrue to his God and his religion which forbids man-worship. A simple token of civil respect Mordecai would not have refused, but to reverence a mortal was contrary to his religion.

V. 3. The king's gate was an open place before the gate of his palace where the people congregated for the administration of justice. It was also the place for audiences for the king. The servants observed that Mordecai did not bow to Haman as the king had commanded.

V. 4. Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew and that was given as a reason why he refused to bow or do reverence to Haman. The servants seem to have called his attention to the matter daily, and at last when they found that he persisted in his course, they told Haman to find out whether the religious scruples of a Jew would be tolerated in opposition to Persian laws and customs.

V. 5. His anger was kindled at the thought of any one daring to refuse obedience to the king's command, tho he cared more for his own glory than he did for the king's command.

V. 6. Putting to death Mordecai would not have satisfied the revengeful spirit of Haman. Mordecai had insulted him as a Jew, and the Jews must pay the penalty. This shows the evil spirit that was in Haman.

V. 7. Nisan corresponds to our March—April. Lots were cast to find the most favorable and most lucky hour for the execution of Mordecai. They tried each day for eleven months. This delay was favorable to Mordecai and the Jews.

V. 8. It is a remarkable fact that the customs and the ceremonies and the religion of the Jews kept them from intermingling with other people and from being absorbed by them. It was true that their laws were diverse from all other peoples.

V. 9. The order was to destroy all the Jews, and for fear that the king might object on the ground that their extermination would seriously depress the public revenue, Haman promised to pay the expense and more out of his private fortune. The amount offered was about twenty million dollars.

V. 10. The ring had the king's seal or signet in it, and with it Haman could sign the necessary documents for the execution of his plans.

V. 11. Not necessarily the silver which Haman had offered the king, but more likely a grant to Haman of all the property of such Jews as should be executed.

The Text Explained

1. *A wicked man promoted.*—Haman was not the first nor the last man promoted to a position of great responsibility without regard to qualification. In all his life and conduct we fail to find anything meritorious or commendable. He was neither a man of honor nor of justice, but lacked true moral courage and common sense. He was proud and wicked and revengeful. A man's promotion is not always an evidence of any special qualification or fitness for the place to which he is called. Political influence counts for more with those in authority than character and fitness. "How many votes does this man control" is made the basis of promotion with those who breathe the foul air of modern politics. This fact, however, should not discourage those who, by steady conduct and real merit, are endeavoring to rise to positions of trust and honor. The sequel of this story shows that the good man wins in the end.

2. *Moral courage.*—If Haman was an example of cowardice, Mordecai, on the other hand, was a man of true moral courage. He had the courage to refuse to bow the knee and give extravagant honors to such a wicked man as Haman was, tho in doing so he endangered his life. It was the courage of a Daniel who refused to defile himself with the king's meat. Henry says: "Tho religion does by no means destroy good manners, but teaches us to render honor to whom honor is due, yet it is the character of a citizen of Zion, that not only in his heart, but in his eyes, such a vile person as Haman was condemned. Let those who are governed by principles of conscience be steady and resolute, however censured or threatened, as Mordecai was." It is a great thing to have the moral courage to do right in the face of such astounding wickedness. It is a fine trait of character that dares to stand up erect when the world about one bows the knee and does honor to wickedness. A lion's den, a furnace seven times heated, a scaffold, may await those who thus dare to go against popular wickedness, but from all these, true moral courage will come forth as silver from the refiner.

3. *Bribery.*—Haman bids high for the privilege of destroying, not Mordecai only, but the whole Jewish family. The offer was equivalent to two millions of dollars, an im-

mense sum, but not any larger than the modern bribe for the privilege of destroying more men and women than Haman's sword ever could have touched. The liquor dealers of this land pay the government each year more than \$75,000,000 for the privilege of wrecking manhood, ruining homes and sending 75,000 of our citizens to a drunkard's grave each year. In calling down judgment on Haman, let us be careful that the same judgment does not fall upon our own heads.

Terse Teachings

Selected.

God still cares for his own.

Better singular than sinning.

Selfishness always over-reaches.

God stands with him who stands for God.

Truth may be troubled, but it is sure to triumph.

Some men serve vanity more faithfully than they serve duty.

Sin's schemes must some day fail, because God is against them.

The crowd will one day bow to him who will not bow with the crowd.

God sometimes lets the wicked get very high before he pulls them down.

There is no meanness to mean for the selfish man whose pride is offended.

God is preparing an overthrow for every one who arrays himself against the truth.

Heart Talks On the Lesson

Selected.

We must read the entire Book of Esther in order to get the spiritual teaching of which it is so full. There is more in the story than is written. It is a "song without words" that will sing in your heart, if you learn and listen, God's precious and inspiring truth. It teaches the power of personal influence; how God uses individuals, and overrules circumstances to work out the designs of his providence and his government, altho those whom he so uses may be quite unaware of the part they have to do. It teaches that a single impulsive word or act discloses character, and may turn events to affect the good or ill of many persons, yes, even of nations. Vashti little thought her high-spirited refusal to obey the whim of Ahasuerus was closely connected with the salvation of the Jews thru out Persia. A word or act of yours this very week may have an influence of which you do not dream.

Let us be careful. This story illustrates the meanness of envy and covetousness. How soon these passions grew to hatred and murder in Haman's heart! Is there anyone for whose good fortune you are not glad? Anyone toward whom you feel resentment or ill-will? Envy and jealousy are demons of destruction. They are to be feared. Let us get them out of our hearts quickly! Haman seems a very hateful person as we read of him here, but I am afraid his spirit is not unknown among our own acquaintances—perhaps including ourselves.

This story teaches, too, that every endowment we have of mind or body may be used in doing good. Esther's personal beauty first won the heart of the king and made it